



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 115

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "**STRENGTH-BASED**" ORGANIZATION (PART 9)

The Second Key: Define the Right Outcomes Managing By Remote-Control

"Why is it so hard to manage people well?"

"I am ultimately responsible for the performance of all missions in my Group's area of responsibility. And yet, everyday, at every Group unit, there is a supervisor and there are crew members...and they are remote from me."

A Commander for a large Group, captures the manager's challenge perfectly: How can you get people to do what you want them to do, when you are not there to tell them to do it? She knows what all great managers know: as a manager, you might think that you have more control, but you don't. You actually have less control than the people who report to you. Each individual employee can decide what to do and what not to do. He can decide the how's, the when's and the with whom's. For good or for ill, he can make things happen.

You can't. You can't make anything happen. All you can do is influence, motivate, berate or cajole in the hope that most of your people will do what you ask of them. This isn't control. This is remote control. And it is coupled, nonetheless, with all of the accountability for the team's performance.

Your predicament is compounded by the fact that human beings are messy. No matter how carefully you selected for certain talents, each of your people arrived with their own style, their own needs and their own motivations. There is nothing wrong with all this diversity -- as a matter of fact, many managers know it is a real benefit to have a team of people who all look at the world in slightly different ways. But this diversity does make your job significantly more complicated. Not only do you have to manage by remote-control, but you have to take into account that each employee will respond to your signals in slightly, but importantly different ways.

If it's any consolation, great managers are in the tightest spot of all. They are further hemmed in by two fervent beliefs. First, described earlier, they believe that people don't change that much. They know that they cannot force everyone in a particular role to do the job in exactly the same way. They know that there is a limit to how much each employee's different style, needs and motivation can be ground down.

Second, they believe that an organization exists for a purpose and that purpose is performance -- with "performance" defined as any outcome that is deemed valuable by either an external or internal customer. The point is to focus his people toward performance. The manager is, and should be, totally responsible for this. This explains why great managers are skeptical about handing all authority down to their people. Allowing each person to make all of his own decisions may well result in a team of fully self-actualized employees, but it may not be a very productive team.

So, this is their dilemma: The manager must retain control and focus people on performance. But, she is bound by his belief that he cannot force everyone to perform in the same way.

Their solution is as elegant as it is efficient: Define the right outcomes and then let each person find his own route toward those outcomes.

This solution may sound simple. But, study it more closely and you can begin to see its power.

First, it resolves the great manager's dilemma. All of a sudden, his two guiding beliefs -- that people are enduringly different and that managers must focus people on the same performance -- are no longer in conflict. They are now in harmony. In fact, they are intertwined. The latter frees you up to capitalize on the former. To focus people on performance, she must define the right outcomes and she must stick to those outcomes religiously. But as soon as she does that, as soon as she standardizes the required outcomes, she has just avoided what he always knew was impossible anyway: forcing everyone to follow the same path toward those outcomes. Standardizing the ends prevents her from having to standardize the means.

If the Group Commander can keep focused on her supervisors' outcomes (mission accomplishment, readiness levels, personnel retention), then she need not waste time evaluating them on the quality of their lesson plans or the details of their budget. If the manager can define very specifically the few outcomes she wants from her people, then she can ignore how well they filled out they completed the "interim" steps in getting there.

Second, it is a supremely efficient solution. The most efficient route that nature has found from point A to point B is rarely a straight line. It is always the path of least resistance. Great managers know that the most efficient way to turn someone's talent into performance is to help her find his own path of least resistance toward the desired outcomes.

With her mind firmly focused on the right outcomes, the great manager can avoid the temptation of correcting each person's style so that it fits the required mold. Instead, she can go with each person's flow, smoothing a unique path toward the desired result. If one team leader achieves the desired outcome through relationship building, one through technical competence and detail-orientation, and another through sheer persuasiveness, then the great manager doesn't have to interfere....just so long as the right objectives are achieved in a quality way.

Third, it is a solution that encourages employees to take responsibility. Great managers want each employee to feel a certain tension, a tension to achieve. Defining the right outcomes creates that tension. By defining, and more often than not, measuring the required outcomes, great managers create an environment where each employee feels that little thrill of pressure, that sense of being out there by oneself with a very definite target. This kind of environment will excite talented employees and scare away the "warm bodies." It is the kind of environment where a person must learn. He must learn the unique combination of plays that work for him time and time again. He must learn how he responds to pressure, how he builds trust with people, how he stays focused, how and when he needs to rest. He must discover his own paths of least resistance.

Defining the right outcomes does expect a lot of employees, but there is probably no better way to nurture self-awareness and self-reliance in your people.

Next: The Third Key: Focus on Strengths.

Regards, FL Ames

Excerpted from: "*First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*"

For more information about the research and book 'First Break All the Rules' please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>

[Flag Voice Contents](#)

This page is maintained by [HR Webmaster \(CG-1A\)](#)